

2007-2008 CHARTER ISSUE SUMMARY

Anti-Discrimination and Sexual Orientation

Issue subject: Should “sexual orientation” be among the classes protected from discrimination by charter Section 840 Anti-Discrimination?

Issue raised by: This was suggested by a citizen via web form, July 19, 2007.

Description of issue: The anti-discrimination provision of the Charter identifies a number of protected classes of individuals, but does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Previous CRCs (1977 and 1997) considered updating the County’s anti-discrimination provision to include sexual orientation, but the recommendations did not go to the ballot.

Suggested charter revision:

Section 840. Anti-Discrimination. There shall be no discrimination in employment or compensation of county officers or employees on account of sex, race, color, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or age except by minimum age and retirement provisions; and the county shall not enter into any contract with any person, firm, organization, corporation, or other non-governmental entity which discriminates on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or age except by minimum age and retirement provisions.

Summary of arguments for and against:

Pro: The Charter should make explicit rights that are granted by county and state law. The rights of all King County citizens are worthy of charter recognition and protection. This will bring our anti-discrimination clause up to the 21st Century.

Con: Protection on account of sexual orientation is already set forth by ordinance and state law. Changes to the charter should only be made in the absence of other mechanisms for establishing citizen rights.

Recommendations: At its first meeting, the Regional Government Subcommittee identified this as an issue that should be addressed by the CRC. The original recommended language for the charter amendment did not include “non-governmental entity.” This was added in order to avoid prohibiting contracts with the federal government, with which King County contracts extensively and which does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Reference documents: Web form submittal by Janet Sailer.